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DESCRIPTION

OF THE

Manners and Customs of the Pawnee Indians.

(By Rr. D. Z. Smith.)

619 643 BANDS OR CLANS.—All the Indian tribes are subdivided into bands or clans. The *Pawnees* have among them four distinct bands, viz: the Loups (pronounced *Loos*,) the Republicans, the Topages, (Tuppays,) and the Grand Pawnees. Each band has at its head a Chief, among whom, however, the Chief of the Grand Pawnees, Asseruregarrigu, is considered the Principal Chief of the whole tribe.

131 VILLAGES, LOCALITIES, FORMER MISSIONARIES, &c.—The Pawnees live in two villages at present, both on the South side of the Platte or Nebraska river. The lower village lies about 50 miles from Bellevue, and about 10 or 15 miles above the mouth of the Elkhorn river, the first important tributary of the Platte from the North; and the upper village is situated about 20 or 25 miles above the lower, nearly opposite the mouth of the Loup Fork of the Platte, the next branch of any consequence above the Elkhorn. 361 Both villages are situated on eminences, so that the approach of an enemy can easily be observed, and a sharp lookout is constantly kept in order to guard against any sudden surprise from a hostile force. Sentinels are constantly posted on all the surrounding 648 heights, who can immediately by signs, known among the Indians, 726 transmit intelligence in case of impending danger. During the night, sentinels are constantly perched upon the tops of the lodges, to guard against any unexpected nocturnal attack.—When we were on our return, and remained over night at the Loup village, a report, probably a false alarm, had reached there during the day, that a large war-party of Sioux had lately been seen near the head waters of the Elkhorn river. During the night the sentinels were as usual posted upon the lodges, a little more noisy, however, than generally, yelling to one another and singing, nearly the whole night. Upon our inquiring why the sentinels made so much noise, we were informed, that it was to let the Sioux know, should they be near, that they might not expect to find them off their guard.

Thus it will be observed, that a certain kind of military organization is constantly kept up at each village, rendered necessary by their wars with their enemies. This unpleasant state of things 000 can only be removed through the benign influence of the Gospel, when "they shall beat their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they *learn* war any more. But they shall sit

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every man under his vine and fig-tree; and *none* shall make them afraid." Mic. 4. 3, 4.

As hinted in a note in a previous communication, (see February Miscellany, p. 62.) the Pawnee villages are not located on their own land. Formerly the land on both sides of the Platte river belonged to them. But about the year 1835 they concluded a treaty with the United States, in which they ceded to the latter all their territory on the South side of the river. Their villages were then situated about 150 miles further up the Platte on the North side. The missionaries of the A. B. C. F. M. were then residing with them, their mission stations being situated in the vicinity of these villages. When the Pawnees were at their homes, which is only four or five months of the year, (the remaining months being consumed on their summer and fall hunts) the missionaries were engaged in teaching such of their children as could be induced to attend school, and in instructing the people in the truths of religion, as well as they could according to their limited knowledge of the language. About six years ago, the powerful Sioux made repeated incursions into the Pawnee country, and the strength of the latter being very much weakened by their frequent wars with their enemies, they were obliged to succomb, and at length forced to leave their former location on the North side of the Platte, and to remove to the South side, nearer to the white settlements on the Missouri river. The missionaries too found it unsafe to remain, and it was thought advisable to suspend their missionary operations among them. Mr. and Mrs. Allis (See August Misc. 1851, pp. 221, 222, and also February Misc. 1852, p. 64.) are remnants of this noble band of missionaries, and, still cherishing the desire, that these benighted but very interesting people might be enlightened by the gospel, have, while their fellow-laborers have long ago left for other fields of usefulness, still lingered behind,—and toiled on, amidst many self-denials, privations, and discouragements, in doing whatever lay in their power for the good of these Indians. Lately the government has established Fort Kearney, not far distant from their former villages, which, it is hoped, will be a security against future incursions, and prove a safeguard, when our mission will once be established among them.

LANGUAGE.—The Pawnee language is said to be altogether different from the languages of the surrounding prairie tribes. The Otoes, the Ioways, the Osages, the Kanzas or Caws, the Omahaws, the Puncaws, etc., seem all to speak dialects of the same language, the Dakota; while the Pawnee language seems, by its great difference, to point back to the earliest periods of the residence of the Indians in this country, when a disruption may have taken place, that formed them into a distinct nation.

POPULATION, LODGES, etc.—The lower village consists of about

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361 80 lodges, with a population of nearly 2,500; and in the upper
161 village there are between 140 and 150 lodges, the population amounting perhaps to 3,500. On approaching a village, the lodges have the appearance of so many small hillocks, of a conical form, huddled up together in the closest possible manner, with only narrow passages between for walking, and the rest of the space filled up by pens, formed of stakes, for confining their ponies during the night, to guard them from being suddenly taken off by a warlike party of another tribe.

342 The Pawnee lodges are of a circular form, large and spacious in the interior; many of them being 50 feet in diameter. Three and sometimes four circular rows of forked trunks of trees are placed upright, at appropriate distances from each other. The row nearest the centre consists of only four such upright timbers, about 15 or 20 feet high, while the crotches in the more exterior rows are shorter and more numerous, in proportion as the circumference is greater. These forks or crotches support thick cross-beams, upon which a frame of long poles is laid, extending from the ground at the outer circumference of the lodge to the top, leaving only an opening at the apex, of about four feet in diameter, to answer the double purpose of letting in the light, and letting out the smoke. Upon the frame work of poles, willow osiers are laid, and the whole is then covered with prairie sod from 12 to 18 inches thick. Immediately below the opening above, a hole is sunk in the centre for the fire-place, common to all the residents of the [592] lodge. From five to ten families, generally related together, have a common occupancy of one lodge, governed by a head man, who may be styled the lodge chief. Around the circumference of the 352 lodge are recesses for sleeping, partitioned off for each family, resembling the berths on board of steamboats, many of which are screened in front and on the sides by willow-twigs laid above each other, tied fast to a frame, which, partly with the reddish bark on, and partly white from having the bark taken off, exhibit considerable taste in those who wrought them. When thus ornamented with twigs, a small opening about two by three feet is left in front to admit the occupants. The bottom of the berth is raised about two feet above the ground by means of large hewn sills, overlaid by thick willow twigs, which are then covered with buffalo-robes. [242] The entrance of the lodge is always on the East side, protected by a passage, closed above and on the sides, of about 15 feet in length,—the door being a large buffalo robe, or several sewed together, hanging before the inner entrance. On the side opposite to the door of each lodge, a recess is reserved, for depositing the skull of a buffalo, surmounted by shields, quivers of arrows, spears, bows, skins, feathers, etc., used for hunting, for medicinal, or religious purposes, as the case may require. In the interme-

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Description of the Manners

In the interme-
diate space between the recesses and the fireplace, mats, about three by five feet, made of rushes, are laid, at convenient distances, for seats; while an extra supply of them, rolled up, and set aside at different places in the lodge, are reserved for extraordinary occasions, as for instance councils or feasts. 352 285

Subsistence.—What the *seal* is to the Greenlander, the *buffalo* is to the Pawnees and other Prairie Indians; and many of their songs, in which reference is made to the buffalo, show that this animal is held in high estimation among them. It will no doubt be a difficult undertaking to wean them from an occupation, which is at the same time a gratifying and exciting sport to them, and which imparts to an individual who distinguishes himself in its pursuit, a character of high standing among his tribe. The great scarcity of the buffalo, however, of late years, since the immense emigration to the far west, has pinched them with want and hunger, and it is evident that they cannot subsist much longer by depending mainly upon this animal as heretofore. This circumstance, though calling forth our warmest sympathies in behalf of their wretched condition, may perhaps be the means, in the hands of an Allwise Providence, of shaking that tenacity and attachment so strongly developed in the Indian character, for long cherished customs, and making them more pliable in adopting the arts of civilization. Their attention must soon be directed to agriculture and the raising of stock, or they must starve.— 262 825

While on the hunt, in the buffalo country, the Pawnees generally have a good supply of fresh meat to subsist on. That portion of their meat which is intended to be jerked, in order to take home with them, they cut into narrow slips, and dry it over the fire, without any salt, where, by the action of the smoke and sun, it soon dries. Several slips are then plaited together, when it is put away into a skin, and reserved for future use. The reason why no salt is added, is probably, first, because it is a scarce article, and secondly, because anything that is salted and dried, imbibes moisture in damp weather, and sooner becomes rancid, than meat dried without salt. 251 [262]

Besides the buffalo, as their main subsistence, they raise some corn, beans, and pumpkins. As they use no other agricultural implements than hoes, their fields are not very extensive. For suitable spots of cultivation they generally select the mouth of a ravine or any spot where, by the washing of the rains, the ground has become loose and mellow, and consequently the sod may more easily be extirpated than in the prairies generally, where the gronnd can only be prepared by turning the thick sod by means of a large prairie plough, and three or four yoke of oxen.— 241 262

Their fields are not enclosed by fences, or any other kind of protection. Having no other stock but horses, which are con- 241 231

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241 stantly herded and watched during the day time, and shut up in
[231] enclosures in the village during the night, fences are unnecessary.
While absent from their homes, their fields are subject to depredations from prairie wolves and deer, which however no ordinary fence could restrain.—Because these poor people have no other agricultural implements than hoes, the spots which they are obliged to select for fields, are often at great distances from each other,
241 and frequently from five to eight miles from their village. When
721 abroad, to prepare and plant them in the spring, and gather the corn in the fall, they are often exposed to attacks of their enemies. While the husband is watching from some neighboring eminence to guard against the stealthy approach of any hostile force, the wive is engaged in the labor of the field. With fear and trembling their field-labor is thus performed, and many a one, while so employed, is suddenly fallen upon and killed by a maraunding party of enemies.

241 When we visited them, they particularly requested us, "to beg
648 their Great Father, the President, that he should be so kind and again break up some ground for them, as he had done in former years, that they might be able to plant more corn." We have brought in the petition of these destitute people before the proper Department at Washington, and it is greatly to be desired that our benevolent Government may do something for them in their wretched state.

721 As has already been remarked, they were in an almost starving
731 condition, when we visited them. The hunt had proved unsuccessful, so that in the lower village they had no meat whatever, and had to depend upon the little corn that they had raised the preceding year. In the upper village they were also in a miserable condition, for, though they had yet a little dried buffalo-meat, the Sioux had during their absence on the hunt, destroyed their village, (their present lodges had been rebuilt since their return,) and carried off a portion of their corn, burnt another portion, and thus very little remained concealed in the "caches," which are made in their lodges.*

251 * A *cache* is a term common among traders and hunters, to designate a hiding-place for provisions and effects. It is derived from the French word *cacher*, to conceal, and originated among the early colonists of Canada and Louisiana; but the secret depository which it designates was in use among the aboriginals long before the intrusion of the white men. It is, in fact, the only mode that migratory hordes have of preserving their valuables from robbery, during their long absences from their villages or accustomed haunts, on hunting expeditions, or during the vicissitudes of war. The utmost skill and caution are required to render their places of concealment invisible to the lynx eye of an Indian. The first care is to seek out a proper situation, which is generally some dry low bank of clay, on the margin of a water course. As soon as the precise spot is pitched upon, blankets, saddle clothes, and other

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Description of the Manners

Hospitality.—The Indian has always been renowned for his hospitality. This trait of character is noticeable among all the tribes. Thus the Pawnees too, though in actual want themselves, showed their good will towards us, by preparing for us the best they could afford. One chief placed before us, besides dried buffalo meat, a small dish of marrow, which by them is considered a great delicacy.— 574 609

Labor.—The more enlightened a people has become through the benign influence of religion, and the cultivation of the arts and sciences, the more the weaker sex attains to that rank in society, which the Creator intended for them; but the more debased and sunk in heathenism a Nation lies, the more is woman enslaved, and held in subjection. So among the Pawnees too, the men are the lords, who, while they themselves are not disposed to do any work, and generally consider it a shame to labor, direct the women, as inferior beings, how everything must be done.—The females, besides attending to the housework, generally incumbent upon their sex, are obliged to cut and carry all the fire-wood; pre- 462 562

coverings, are spread over the surrounding grass and bushes, to prevent foot-tracks, or any other derangement; and as few hands as possible are employed. A circle of about two feet in diameter is then nicely cut in the sod, which is carefully removed, with the loose soil immediately beneath it, and laid aside in a place where it will be safe from anything that may change its appearance. The uncovered area is then digged perpendicularly to the depth of about three feet, and is then gradually widened so as to form a conical chamber of six or seven feet deep. The whole of the earth displaced by this process, being of a different color from that on the surface, is handed up in a vessel, and heaped into a skin or cloth, in which it is conveyed to the stream and thrown into the midst of the current, that it may be entirely carried off. Should the cache not be formed in the vicinity of a stream, the earth thus thrown up is carried to a distance, and scattered in such a manner as not to leave the minutest trace. The cave being formed, is well lined with dry grass, bark, sticks, and poles, and occasionally a dried hide. The property intended to be hidden is then laid in, after having been well aired: a hide is spread over it, and dried grass, brush, and stones, thrown in, and trampled down until the pit is filled to the neck. The loose soil, which had been put aside, is then brought, and rammed down firmly, to prevent its caving in, and is frequently sprinkled with water, to destroy the scent, lest the wolves and bears should be attracted to the place, and root up the concealed treasure. When the neck of the cache is nearly level with the surrounding surface, the sod is again fitted in with the utmost exactness, and any bushes, stocks, or stones, that may have originally been about the spot, are restored to their former places. The blankets and other coverings are then removed from the surrounding herbage: all tracks are obliterated: the grass is gently raised by the hand to its natural position, and the minutest chip or straw is scrupulously gleaned up and thrown into the stream. After all is done, the place is abandoned for the night, and, if all be right next morning, is not visited again, until there be a necessity for re-opening the cache. Four men are sufficient in this way, to conceal the amount of three tons weight of provisions or merchandize, in the course of two days.—*Washington Irving's Astoria, or Anecdotes of an Enterprise beyond the Rocky Mountains.* 251

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462 562 pare the fields for cultivation with their hoes, plant the corn, weed it, and finally, when ripe, gather it in; and take care of the horses of their lords, when not used by them.

462 562 342 The most difficult labor, however, that falls to their lot, is the erecting of their lodges. As the upper village had been burnt by their enemies during their absence, the labor of rebuilding of course devolved upon the poor women, and in the course of about two months, when we visited them, they had completed nearly 150 lodges. When we observed, that the nearest timber to the site of the village was two or three miles off, and that they have [482] no beasts of burden, but that all the building material, much of which is very heavy, was carried so great a distance on the shoulders of the women, it seemed almost incredible to us. We noticed even girls of 12 or 14 years bearing baskets on their backs, filled with wet turf, to cover or repair their lodges, which must have been very heavy. Thus early the females are trained to [868] carry burdens, (either at home, or while travelling,) which inures them to hardships, but at the same time deforms them, rendering them low and bent in stature, and pitiable objects to the beholder. While the men, trained to no work whatever, are erect, tall, and [142] well-proportioned in their form, and almost feminine in their features, the women are short and low, with stooping gait, downcast looks, harsh features, and hair dishevelled; and dirty, ragged, and 000 filthy in their appearance. Such is a picture of heathenism! Have we not cause to be grateful for the benign influence of the gospel upon our land, so that we are elevated far above such a miserable state of heathenism? Unto the Lord be all the praise!

462 562 Though it is generally a feature among heathen nations, that it is considered a shame for the men to labor, while all the work devolves upon the females, still the Pawnees seem not altogether indisposed to be instructed. Mr. Sharpee, who has been acquainted with them and other Indians in these parts for nearly 20 years, told us, that the Pawnee men were unlike those of other tribes, since they were willing to lay hold of a plough, or any other farming utensil, and only the instruction was wanting to make them industrious. Mr. Allis too, who has been acquainted with them for the last 20 years, and has lived among them a great portion of this period, informed us, that when the missionaries were formerly living among them, several of the Pawnees had already commenced the use of the plough. The good beginning was, however, interrupted by their missionaries having to leave them.

291 Dress.—The dress of the men consists in nothing but a small piece of cloth, fastened around their middle. This, we observed, was generally the only covering they had on, when in their lodges. When abroad, they had a buffalo robe or blanket wrapped around them. The females are more decently clothed than the men

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Their dress consists of leggings, generally made of scarlet cloth; over which a piece of blue or brown woollen cloth is tied around the waist, the ends lapping over each other, and extending a little below the knees. The upper dress consists of a shirt or short gown, made of calico, reaching to the middle. Over the whole a blanket or robe is slung, above which, on the back, may frequently be discovered the black sparkling eyes of a little "papoose" peering forth.

INTOXICATING DRINK.—It is somewhat remarkable, that the Pawnees are not so fond of "fire water," as other tribes, who are fast dwindling away from the demoralizing and debasing effects of intoxicating drink. Nothing, perhaps, has aided more in diminishing the population of different Indian tribes, than spirituous liquors. To the missionary, it is always gratifying and encouraging to observe, when a tribe takes a bold stand against the introduction of this destructive poison. The Pawnees allow none to be brought into their villages.

BURYING THEIR DEAD.—On the highest mounds in the prairie, we often observed little hillocks of earth, which we were informed, were the places of sepulture of their chiefs and others of their tribe. A tall bush was frequently stuck in the ground, to designate the spot. We were also informed, that among the Pawnees, and other wild tribes, the cruel practice prevails, when they are on their hunt, and their old people get so feeble, that they can no longer accompany them, of leaving them behind, and even burying them alive.—In allusion to this fact, Mr. Allis, pointing to their old and feeble chief, addressed the other chiefs as follows: "I have learned, that you intend to put aside your old chief, because he is now feeble and sickly, and perhaps you will even think of burying him, when he can no longer follow you; but I want you to take care of him. He has been like a father to you. When he was yet strong, you know his kettle was always over the fire with plenty. He has always been a friend of the whites, and you ought to esteem him for the services he has rendered your nation, and not to bury him before he is dead."

More might be added, to show the wretchedness of their present state, but we should fear to become too tedious. Sufficient, however, has been said, to prove, that these poor people need the assistance of missionaries to better them in their outward condition. But, when we consider their spiritual destitution,—their ignorance, darkness, and superstition,—

Shall WE whose souls are lighted
With wisdom from on high,
Shall WE to men benighted
The lamp of life deny?"

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"Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord, shall be saved." But "how shall they call on him, in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10. 13, 14.) In the face of all difficulties, let us not be deterred from bringing the glad tidings of Salvation to these benighted savages; thereby perhaps paving the way for still more extensive operations among the aborigines of our country; and thus, by breaking unto them the bread of life, proving the means of repairing, in part, the numberless wrongs inflicted upon this poor abject race, by people who call themselves christians.